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## PIETY AND RELIGION

When Nehemiah undertook to re-establish the Jewish state he was subject to most of the trials and temptations which beset us today. His enemies despised him as unmilitary. Hyphenated citizenship threatened the integrity of his national purpose. Proposals for peace conferences threatened national morale. Profiteering and labor troubles hindered fortification. And at last he was urged by a treacherous friend to abandon his work and go into the temple to save his life.

All of these difficulties he overcame. But the proposal to replace patriotism with piety he repudiated with a scornful, "Should such a man as I flee?"

Therein he distinguished between piety and religion.

This distinction, not often made, will be more common in the future. Piety must be coupled with service of one's fellows if it is to be a part of real religion. A pious man who merely prays, cultivates his religious emotions, and keeps from doing things that give pleasure may be the most selfish man imaginable. Further, he may be a dangerous member of the community. For he does not undertake to better the conditions under which he and his fellows must live.

Pacifism is a form of piety. It is a consecration of one's self to ideals one thinks men ought to have, and an avoidance of the hard tasks which must be done if such ideals are ever to be reached.

Pacifism is no more a national peace policy than piety is religion.

There are times when duty must be given priority over abstract ideals.

There are times when to retreat from a disordered and appalling world-situation into the quiet of the inner life and the enjoyment of

peaceful detachment from anxiety is nothing less than contemptible cowardice.

To be religious is to believe that there is personal direction in human history that human institutions and human society can become more moral, and that there is a God whose will can be incorporated in social evolution in the same proportion that it is understood and followed.

Many men in order to maintain the warmth of faith in God trust solely to the agencies of piety. Probably no one can be effectively religious unless he does have his moments of prayer and contemplation his place of worship, his times of meeting, his discipline, and his cultivation of the inner life.

But the degree to which these means of piety are effective depends largely upon temperament. Religion leads a man, regardless of temperament, to apply God's will as seen in the spirit and ideals of Jesus to actual conditions. If the church needs to be criticized he will criticize it. If piety needs to be rationalized he will attempt to show it the path of reason, but above all he will attempt to mediate God to others and to the social order in which he lives.

In these days of strain we cannot keep ourselves sane and hopeful without faith in God, nor can we keep ourselves manly and useful if we seek to escape from disagreeable and tragic duties. We need to say with Nehemiah "Who is there that being such as I should go into the temple to save his life?" For like Nehemiah we may discover that those who have counseled us to substitute piety for the performance of national duty have been hired to offer this advice.